

The Challenges and Implication of Dual Carrier Women on Future Work Force in Malaysia: A
Global Perspective

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ABSTRACT

The trend of workforce in Malaysia shows that more than 60% of the working women are married. Hence we can foresee that there will be a major impact on future working culture as more women enter the workforce. This trend can interfere negatively with home life in three distinct ways that is time, health, and psychological spillover. The most well documented pressures family members experience in balancing work and family are work overload and conflict due to multiple roles. Hence this paper will discuss the findings based on an exploratory study done among 1006 working women. It intends to bring forward the various challenges faced by working women and its implication on their carrier and family life, together with the importance of family friendly policies at work. These policies are important because studies indicated supportive supervisor may be equivalent to having a supportive spouse in terms of its effect on working women in balancing work and family issues. Finally the paper will put forward various strategies that will act as guideline for human resource managers in managing future work force in Malaysia.

Key word: Dual carrier women, Work and Family Conflict, Family Friendly Policies and Human Resource Managers.

Introduction

The trend of workforce in Malaysia shows that more than 60% of the working women are married. Hence we can foresee that there will be a major impact on future working culture as more women enter the workforce. Dual carrier women face work – family conflict when participation in the work role and the family role is incompatible. The conflict happens when demands of the family life are incompatible with the demands of work life often forcing women to leave the workforce (Coontz, 1992; Higgins, Duxbury, & Lee, 1994; Marshall & Barnett, 1993; Roehling, Moen, & Batt, 2003). Other studies in relation to this work-life conflict have also found that work-related stress is increasingly recognized as one of the most serious occupational health hazards, often resulting in employee dissatisfaction, lowered productivity, absenteeism, and turnover (Cummins, 1990; Spielberger & Reheiser, 1995). Hence the needs for family friendly policies are important to reduce not only the implication of the conflict to the family but also to the organizational effectiveness. In fact studies have also shown that a supportive supervisor may be equivalent to having a supportive spouse in terms of its effect on stress (National Council for Jewish Women, 1988).

Areas of concern

The most well documented pressures family members experience in balancing work and family are overload and conflict due to multiple roles. They have too much to do and too little time in which to do it (Lewis and Cooper, 1997 – Hansen). Other than that, there are a number of variable that have been found to moderate the difficulties with balancing work and family. For couples, the extent of the husband's participation in household tasks and the correspondence between the wife's employment status and the preferences of both the husband and the wife herself are important. Despite the demonstrated importance and recent modest increases, however studies indicated relatively little male participation in child care and housework. (Thompson & Beauvais, Lyness, 1999 ; Ferree,1990)

How does career affect family?

Piotrkowski (1979) hypothesized that work can interfere negatively with home life in three distinct ways, that is time, energy and psychological spillover. First, the process involves the time spent at work and away from home. Time spent at work directly reduces the time available for non work roles

The second way work can spill over is through psychological absorption of the worker. The worker becomes mentally preoccupied with work concerns, even when not at work (Crouter et. al.,1983). Finally, the physical and psychological challenges of work can fatigue the individual which lead to less available energy with which to pursue non work activities (Crouter et al., 1983; Piotrkowski, 1979). That is, work fatigues the worker so that she has little time to adequately pursue personal activities and relationships in non work settings.

Importance of the study

The information obtained from this study will help us to explore the reciprocities between work and family and gender roles, as well as family member's expectation about work. It provides insight into the dilemmas, challenges and strength of dual carrier women in view of helping in the future working force in Malaysia.

Method

A purposive sampling approach was used for this cross-sectional survey. Women employees who attended workplace seminar on issues on women are qualified to participate in the study. The information from the participants was collected through questionnaires. The questionnaires were filled and returned before the participants left the seminar. All questions in the questionnaire were read out one by one to the participants until it was completed. Any doubts about the questions were clarified as each question was read to the participants in the study.

Findings

The following are the findings of the study carried out among 1006 dual carrier women who participated voluntarily in this study.

Workload Perspective

Caring Responsibilities

Findings in this study indicated that the respondents were in conflict between responsibilities at home and work. The respondents have clearly indicated among the caring responsibilities are not only involved taking care of the child needs but also the elderly care. This sometimes is more problematic for the ones who are involved with elderly care as it is still scarcely available; even it exist it comes with a very heavy payments. These findings are similar to other findings in the past whereby, dual career women are more likely to face more difficulty in career growth (Pixley & Moen, 2003). Thus, there is a double push on dual career women as their times compete between two competing ideal-types of ideal mother and family caregiver and devoted career women.

Sharing Housework

Based on the findings in this study, majority of the housework is done by the career women without much help from their family members. This study found that the respondents indicated that only 17.0 per cent of the husband helped in their housework. They too indicated that the type of help from their spouse is called as “only when needed” or “only when asked”. The type of housework done by dual career women include such as preparing family meals, washing dishes, taking care of children, helping with children’s homework, cleaning the house, making family budget, doing the laundry, shopping for groceries, taking out the garbage and meeting with the child’s

teacher at school etc. For some women being a wife, mother and a worker is just too much to cope as also in other previous studies (2000; Fukumaru, 2000; Kim, 1995; Kim, & Hurh, 1988). This was supported by studies in the past that women do most of the house chores even while having a career. (Harvey, et al. 2001).

Similar result was found with regard to childcare and housekeeping, dual career couple may struggle with dividing chores equally. Even though both husband and wife work full time, studies shown that the wife still carries the burden of childcare and housekeeping (Bianci, Milkie, Sayer, & Robinson, 2000; Hochschild, 1989; Deutch & Saxon, 1998). It may be difficult for dual-career couples to change social standards that they have lived with all of their lives. However, an equal division of labor at home, often leads to fatigue on the part of the wife, and conflict for the couple.

Thus this finding indicates the need for the change in paradigm towards sharing housework, as noted in another local study, that the married women who have the helping hands from their husband was found to be happier and have a more successful career (Noor 2006). In fact, according to the Ministry of Health, Malaysia, in 1996 women are facing 1.5 times more mental stress compared to men (Najibah 2000). In fact such stress is found to be higher among the married working women compared to single worker. Among the reasons stated for the cause of this stress are due to work overload and increasing expectation from home and work responsibilities. In fact studies from the past have also supported that women do most of the household chores compared to men (Voydanoff, 1988).

Time conflict Perspective

Almost 54.9 per cent of the respondents agreed that they have little time left for their husband as they are bogged with all kind of commitments from the work that they do to the point of sacrificing their "husband time." In fact 15.0 per cent of the women could not recall when is the last time they had quality time with their husband because they are too tired. As one of the respondents commented " *I had so much over time at work to the extent that I am not able to do any overtime or even part time with my husband.* "

Adopting the social structural ties, some authors argue that men are primary beneficiaries of the traditional marriage, are more likely to have structure the relationship to their liking, and thus have little or less interest in changing the status quo (Harvey, et al. 2001). Hence there are rewards and challenges in the dual-career couples. In order to make marriage the best can be, dual career

couples must willing to take the time to talk, to get away for an evening, or to take weekend holiday with their family. After all, marriage is the center of the family and a strong loving friendship between spouses builds a strong family.

Time for self

More than half of the respondent realized that they actually do not have much time to do any kind of self pampering. Thus, private companies can provide “space out” program for the career women to choose to time out with their family or to pamper themselves. As part of the corporate social responsibility, private sectors can provide necessary facilities to rejuvenate their women workforce. They can even provide gym facilities, fitness centers, spa in between and after working hours to revitalize them. This is important as the working women in this study indicated that they are happier because they have “time out”. As one of the respondents in the interview noted that she feels that ‘time out’ activities like meeting family matters and self pampering movements during working hours have reduced her stress of managing work-life balance.

Time for Socializing

Respondents in this study indicated that they do not feel that by taking care of their family will make them less involved in their workplace. But on the other hand, they recognized that the role strain exists in trying to cope between work and family demands. The more time women allocate to work places, the less they have to allocate to their families (Edward & Rothbard, 2000; Lambert, 1990). In view of such similar problems, this finding also shows that 40.1 per cent of the respondents are finding a hard time to meet friends and to socialize. Many see this as a possible means to reduce their stress as they can talk and have fun with friends or relatives.

This is similar to the findings by Campbell (1976) and his researchers that there was a significant relationship between the number of close friends and or ones’ social network and life satisfaction. Outside support in terms of friendships were also important to the couples in the Rapoport's study (1976). The dual-career couples formed friendships on a couple bases, associating with other career couples. "Friendships, while gratifying, are also demanding, and in many of the couples there was a relatively explicit emphasis on the mutual service aspects of the relationship as well as the recreational aspect"

(Rapoport, p. 316). Thus, establishing friendships with couples like themselves helped to validate the lifestyle for these dual-career couples

Psychological perspective

Choice between carrier and family

Poloma (1972) found that the dual-career women in her study the career mother noted that she was a happier mother and wife because she worked outside their home than she would be if she were a fulltime homemaker. The irony is that as many as 47.4 per cent of women in this study indicated that they feel trapped due to role conflict between work and home. In addition, 53.2 per cent of the respondents agreed that they do not have enough time as they have too many work commitment. In fact 34.1 per cent of the respondents agreed that they in fact do not have enough sleep in trying to finish their extra work responsibilities at home. Data also indicated that almost 70.0 per cent of the women who responded that they felt that their life is stressful also replied that they felt inadequate and not fair to their children because of not spending enough time to attend to their children.

This particular finding indicates clearly that the dual career couples must wrestle with the dilemmas of how to support each other's career development, while juggling childcare, housekeeping, and their personal relationship. If one member offered a promotion that requires moving out of the district, the dual-career couples faces the conflict of whose career comes first. Relocation often comes at the cost to the women career, which is at risk under employed following career movement. (LeClare & McLaughlin, 1997; Morrison & Lichter, 1988). In this dilemma, when faced with career turning point, the husband's career is more often given priority over the wife career (Pixley & Moen, 2003). If they met each other while working at the same company, they must often challenge anti-nepotism policies within the company, forbidding married people to work together.

Health Perspectives in terms of cost to the organization

Results from the study shows that more than half of the respondents (55.0%) have various health related problems such as migraine, high blood pressure, diabetes, feel dizzy, tension in the neck, muscle cramps, sleeping problems, general body pain and such. One of the major causes of these problems as indicated by the respondents is related to household chores. As much as 68.4 per cent commented that they face lots of hurdles in managing household

chores. And as high as 82.4 per cent indicated that they handle alone house responsibilities while managing their career. In fact, this study also indicated that women who are having the most physical symptoms such as headache, dizziness, muscle cramp, migraine, indigestion are significantly related to the ones who responded that they faced difficulty in trying to juggle both housework and carrier.

In fact many other research support that many managers in organization cite issues with lost time at work, lack of motivated workers, and loss of worker productivity resulting from work-family conflict (Love, Galinsky, & Hughes, 1987; Aryee & Luk, 1996). Absenteeism, employee turnover, and job satisfaction attributable to the existence or non-existence of quality of work life concepts in the work place (Peluchette, 1993; Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1992).

Absenteeism, employee turnover, employee morale, and job satisfaction may be directly related to the firm's ability to offer quality work-life programs which the employee perceives as important in coping with work-life issues. If employees face simultaneous problems in meeting the demands of work and family, the organization usually suffers in terms of lost time at work and turnover of personnel due to inability to cope with family and work demands concurrently or to relocate when required by the organization. The conflicts obviously affect employees focus confronting between work and family. Under such circumstances, work-life conflict hinders overall organization productivity (Fernandez, 1986; Near, Rice, & Hunt, 1980).

These findings are similar to past research that explained dilemma of work and family can have negative implication on health (Aminah, 1999). Moreover, there will be spillover effects whereby it will bring about social problems. In fact, as a result of trying to juggle between family matters and work has caused women to suffer from depression (Karasek & Theorell, 1990; Paden & Buchler, 1995). Such findings mean that the dual career conflict can affect the productivity of the workers and finally affecting the profit of the company.

Strategy

Based on the findings of the study above the following guidelines can be used to overcome the challenges of women on the future work force. In sum the

conflict between work and home has created a number of negative effects in terms of work, health, psychology and their carrier

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The need for the change in family paradigm

Francine Blau (1998) indicates that the amount of time spend by women doing housework has declined since the 1970s, although women continue to spend considerably more time than men doing such work (Bianchi, Milkie, Sayer, & Robinson, 2000; Hoshchild, 1989). While, the length of the average work week has changed a little, the aggregate amount of time that couple spent at work has increased dramatically (Jacobs & Garson, 2001; Mishel, Bernstein, & Schmitt, 2001). But in reality the results in this study showed that only a small percentage of the husbands really share their household chores though both are working fulltime.

Preparing for the future workforce

Many times we have realized that the changes that occur in the West will soon occur in other parts of the world, and Malaysia has to be prepared for this change. Specifically, the trend of dual-career couples have higher income by dual earning and there is greater economic security associated with having two sources of income. As a result, dual-earned couple swiftly replacing the traditional married couple model of a “breadwinner” husband and “homemaker” wife. In U.S., Current Population survey (CPS) shows the proportion of dual-earned couple in which wives earned more than their husbands increased from 16 percent in 1981 to 23 percent in 1996. The data suggested that the presence of a growing number of married couples in which traditional gender role vis-à-vis labor market activity may be reversed, that is, wife is the primary earner and the husband is the secondary earner (Winkler, 1998). By the steady decline in the earning power of men’s wages, making women employment a necessity for many family (Wilkie, 1991; Mishel, Benstein, & Schmitt, 2001). Hence such pattern will soon be faced by the Malaysian workforce in the near future considering the present population of students in both public and private universities are dominated by female students.

Redesign Practices

Organizations can implement or redesign practices to reflect consideration of the issues facing dual-career couples. As a result, they may avoid the costs

resulting from home stress spilling over to work. Creative practices designed to accommodate the needs of working couples are emerging in companies across the United States (Hall & Hall, 1978; Koplemann, Rosenweigh & Lally, 1982). Unfortunately, despite expressed interest in supporting families, the actual practices of most companies lag behind expressed attitudes of workers (Catalyst Career and Family Center, 1997). Employers may be reluctant to adopt new quality of work-life practices partly because they lack clear evidence of their effects, both for employees and the organizations. Although an array of new options exists, confusion surrounds the election of practices to best meet the needs of an organization's specific employee population.

Supportive policies and management

Employee perception of the support their company provides them in balancing career with family roles affect critical employee attitudes such as employee commitment, job satisfaction, and employee morale. Researcher identified a causal relationship between employee perceptions of the support of their company with employee productivity and have established a correlation of worker's attitude of quality of work life concepts with employee morale, employee loyalty to the organization, and overall job satisfaction (Jacob, & Gerson, 2000; Gornic, & Meyers, 2003, Lewis, 2002). Practices such as flextime and childcare are typically assumed to be helpful to dual-career couple's employees with families.

Employee's perceptions may be a crucial barometer of the usefulness of family support practices in diminishing home-career conflicts and may assist companies in selecting and implementing new benefits while also enhancing organizations productivity. Organizations that minimally support and consider employee's family responsibilities in terms of personnel practices may experience decreased acceptance of the organization's values. This may lead to diminished loyalty to the company, decreased willingness to exert effort of work (decreasing worker productivity), and the employee may choose to leave the company in favor of organizations who support quality work-life programs and practices which employees perceived as deemed important.

The attitude of the employers toward work family conflict is at least as important to worker well-being as are workplace policies. Employees who perceive their supervisors as being understanding and supportive when they confront work-family conflict report lower levels of psychological and physiological distress, and work-family conflict, and are less likely to

contemplate leaving their job (Eagle, Icenogle, Meas, & Miles, 1998; Fox & Dwyer, 1999; Goff, Mount, & Jamison, 1990; Pisarski, Bohle, & Callan, 1998; Thomas & Ganster, 1995; Roehling & Moen, 2003). Supervisor support is also link to higher levels of job satisfaction feeling of success, and greater loyalty toward one's employer (Roehling, Roehling, & Moen, 2001; Thomas & Gangster, 1995; Valcourt & Batt, 2003).

Organizational Arrangements to Ease the Conflict

Work schedule

Studies show that greater independence at work and control of one's work schedule reduces these conflicts. As such, employer's who are concerned about welfare and productivity of their employees, might reduce employees stress by offering flexi-time, more part time employment opportunities, and support for employees who need to take family leave time. Studies by Galinsky and Bond (1988) on the businesses in the U.S. found that over two thirds of large employers allow their workers to periodically change starting and quitting times and one quarter allow employees to change starting and quitting times on a daily basis.

Work from home

The use of technology to perform paid work while at home is another way used by working couples. New technology allows workers to be more available for family related needs, thereby relieving some strain endemic to dual earner couples. However, sometimes as an example, telecommunication technology are not available to all employees. Women and employees involved in direct services to consumer are less likely to have flextime available to them than other workers (Galinsky & Bond, 1998; Hinggin, Duxbury, Lee, & Mills, 1994). These direct services workers often have the greatest need for workplace flexibility because they lack the financial resources to hire someone to take care of their family needs in their stead (Roehling & Moen, 2003).

Organizational Daycare and Elderly care

Paid Leave

As family work pattern have shifted, the demand for time off from work to address family needs has become increasingly urgent. In the absence of paid

family and medical leave, working families are forced to choose between economic security and providing vital care for ill children and family. Many employers do not provide sick leave to their workers or their families when they are sick. In US, two-third of low income mothers and more than one one-third of moderate and upper income mothers lose pay when they miss work because a child is sick (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2003). From this perspective, it is unfair in the sense that the workers has the same need to stay home when ill, but that it costs low income workers much more to do so than do upper income workers. When low income workers with no paid sick leave opt to stay home, the employer forfeits their wages and earns even less according to their pay period. The higher income worker who has paid sick leave, on the other hand suffers no wage loss when she chooses to stay home.

The main cost of paid family leave would be direct monetary costs to employees and employers. The cost depends on how many people would take up paid family leave, and how long the leave would be. First, employees who are currently taking unpaid leave to care their families would now take partial paid leave. Second, some of these people may take longer leaves due to the pay leave. Third, some people who are currently using vacation or sick leave in order to take care of their families may switch and start using the paid family leave. Parents who have paid sick leave or vocation are five times more likely to stay home with a sick child than are those who lack such benefits, and it is well documented that ill children recover more quickly when their parents are present (American Academy of Pediatrics 2003; Haymann 2000; Ruhm 2000).

In the long run, employers may ultimately lower their wages to workers because of their partial provision of family leave. However, the ability of employers to do so is limited because it might make them less competitive in attracting employees who do not stand to gain as much from paid family leave. The cost of losing employee alone can be far greater than the cost of providing short-term leave to retain existing employees. A minimum amount of paid sick leave covered by employers will have no serious impact in organizations that already provide paid sick leave.

In United States, the law does not legally require employers to offer paid leave to their employees. U.S law does not even require employers to provide unpaid leave, with one notable exception. All across Europe and in many others regions, government policies have provided mothers with wage replacement and job security for extended periods immediately before and after of now child (Gornick & Meyers 2003; Heyman et.all, 2004; Kemerman & Kahn, 1991).

Implications for Future Research

Thus far, there has not been much research done on the topic of work and family balance in Malaysia. Studies done in the western countries are used as a catalyst for local researchers to understand this issue better. For example, there are countries who introduced a guaranteed right to work part-time for all employees (Germany, Holland, Finland, Belgium) or for parents (France) while implementing the European Directive on Part-time work of 1997.

Balancing work and personal life is a dynamic and gradual process; it differs from one individual to the other; and thus is not easily replicated. Therefore, longitudinal research is desperately needed to determine how leaders manage to balance their work and life, and what variables lead to either success or failure. For such a research, a representative sample can be drawn from executive attending work-life balance workshops and/or other executives contemplating changes in their lifestyle.

Work–family balance is an omnipresent factor in contemporary organizations and society. Unfortunately, theoretical and conceptual development of work–family balance has not kept pace with popular interest. Substantial research needs to be done to fully develop a complete understanding of this important construct; yet, with a solid conceptualization in place, HRD professionals have a foundation upon which to begin creating strategies that contribute to organizational goals by helping workers achieve work–family balance.

Conclusion

Quality of the organization is very much dependent on the quality of the workers. As such in view of the various negative implication of the effects of the conflicts of the dual career women the adoption of a family friendly policy is deemed to be vital to prevent losing their priceless workers, their profit but also the for continual survival of the organization itself.

It is imperative upon the organizations to understand the needs of their employees and systemically provide the necessary environment to develop and harness the employees' potentials and abilities without neglecting their family commitment and responsibilities. Thus, human resource managers need to be more creative and responsive to the workforce family needs and welfare to ensure organization productivity sustainability.

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